

Medicine counterfeiting is first and foremost a crime against patients

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)¹, "a counterfeit medicine is one which is deliberately and fraudulently mislabeled with respect to identity and/or source. Counterfeiting can apply to both branded and generic products and counterfeit products may include products with the correct ingredients or with the wrong ingredients, without active ingredients, with insufficient active ingredients or with fake packaging."

Counterfeit medicines threaten the full range of legitimate medicines, including any therapeutic area and traditional medicines.

Potentially all countries are affected by this crime

Falsified medicines have been found in 124 countries² and everybody, whether rich or poor, is at risk of this criminal activity.

Counterfeiting poses a public health threat

Use of counterfeit medicines can result in treatment failure extended illness, disability, development of medicine resistance or even death. Patients are also more likely to face medicine adverse reactions.

Products without active pharmaceutical ingredients deprive patients of essential cure for their therapy and worsen their medical condition.

Products with the wrong or toxic ingredients put the patient's life in danger and may induce symptoms that could deter diagnosis and effective management of medical conditions.

Moreover, the existence of counterfeit medicines may erode public confidence in health systems³.

¹ WHO definition of counterfeit medicines : <http://www.who.int/medicines/services/counterfeit/overview/en/>

² PSI, 2012, www.psi-inc.org

³ WHO factsheets <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs275/en>



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Who we are | What we do

The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) is the global federation representing over three million pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists worldwide.

FIP develops statements and guidelines that support policy development worldwide. Since its first statement on counterfeit medicines in 1999 (updated in 2003), FIP has been involved in many activities to increase awareness and to educate pharmacists on the issue of counterfeit medicines. Through congresses, publications, its coordinating role of the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA), campaign on counterfeit medicines or its involvement in the International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce, FIP has helped increase awareness and mobilize stakeholders and national associations of pharmacists on this issue. FIP **developed specific tools to assist pharmacists in their fight against counterfeit medicines** (such as a visual inspection list or a framework to facilitate the creation of a guide for pharmacists on counterfeit medicines at national level), while enabling best practice-sharing of anti-counterfeit campaigns through its website.

The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA) represents the research-based pharmaceutical companies and associations across the globe. The research-based pharmaceutical industry's 1.3 million employees research, develop and provide medicines and vaccines that improve the life of patients worldwide. Based in Geneva, IFPMA has official relations with the United Nations and contributes industry expertise to help the global health community find solutions that improve global health.

Patient safety is the utmost priority for IFPMA. IFPMA members collaborate with regulatory authorities to ensure traceability of products and by supporting online awareness (Alliance for Safe Online Medicines). With its "**10 principles on counterfeit medicines**", released in 2010, IFPMA stated the need for **common approaches involving all stakeholders along the supply chain**, including wholesalers and pharmacists, governments, health care providers, patients, the private sector and the WHO to pursue a long-term, sustainable strategy for tackling the spread of counterfeit medicines. Such approaches include education campaigns about the risks posed by counterfeit medicines.



THE THREAT OF FALSE FRIENDS

*Joining efforts to protect patients
against online sales of fake medicines*

Internet: A new global marketplace for counterfeit medicines?

A closer look at the facts reveals the magnitude of the problem:



More than 50% of medicines purchased worldwide from illegal online sources are counterfeit⁴.



Of 81 countries inspected by Interpol, 48 were identified as sources of counterfeit products in 2011⁵.



The earnings from the largest illegal online medicine sellers are estimated USD 1 to 2.5 million⁶ monthly.

- Of approximately 9,000 websites delivering to patients in the USA, 96% did not meet patient safety standards and/or pharmacy practice standards according to US state and federal laws⁷.
- Within postal traffic in Europe, 69% of detained packages are medicines⁸.
- There are 600 illegal online pharmacy websites delivering to Japanese patients. Japanese Customs authorities have made 500 discoveries of illegal medicines with nearly 80,000 tablets seized. The vast majority of these medicines were purchased online⁹.

⁴ WHO factsheets <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs275/en>

⁵ Operation Pangea IV. <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Pharmaceutical-crime/Operations/Operation-Pangea>

⁶ Based on data collected by University of California San Diego (UCSD)

⁷ NABP Reports, Internet Drug Outlet Identification Program Progress Report for State and Federal Regulators: (January 2012)

⁸ European Commission, Headlines(2011). http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/semeta/index_en.htm

⁹ Reported by pharmaceutical companies in Japan

A double edged sword

More and more patients use the Internet to buy their medicines. For example, in 2011 nearly three million people in the USA ordered a prescription medicine from an online medicine seller outside the country¹⁰.

There are several reasons why patients consider purchasing medicines online:



Assumption of quicker delivery times



Stigma around diseases



Fear of disclosure



Mistrust of doctors



Assumption of lower prices



Lack of local availability



Addiction to medicines

The Internet is far from being a safe way to buy medicines and has become a prime location for thousands of illegal and deceitful websites selling potentially unsafe, poor quality and counterfeit medicines while pretending to be legitimate pharmacies.

¹⁰ Consumer Reports National Research Center Survey (August 2011)

Actions are possible

Individual and cooperative work of governments, international organizations and the private sector are needed to tackle the sale of illegal medicines by illegitimate online pharmacies.

To achieve this partnership approach, focus should be placed on:

- Behavioral change through awareness raising and robust education initiatives to inform and engage populations on the dangers of purchasing medicines online from illegitimate sellers.
- Effective legislation allowing tough sanctions, and effective enforcement against providers, conveyers and facilitators of counterfeit medicines bought over the Internet.

In 2012, 3.75 million potentially life-threatening medicines sold on the Internet were seized; more than 18,000 websites engaged in illegal activity were shut down in 100 countries¹¹. Compared to 2011, the seizures increased by 1.35 million and 4500 more websites were shut down.

The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA) are united in promoting access to and responsible use of safe and efficacious medicines. They are joining efforts to raise awareness about dangerous practices and to combat unsafe medicines, including those sold through illegitimate online medicine sellers. Illegitimate sellers circumvent laws, regulations and pharmacy standards developed to ensure patient safety.

FIP and IFPMA recommend that patients ensure they are buying their medicines from legitimate and reputable sources such as brick-and-mortar pharmacies and, in countries where e-pharmacies are authorized, through accredited online pharmacies.

Some examples:

- Some accreditation programs ensuring Internet pharmacy's compliance with laws have been developed (e.g. VIPPS accreditation program in the USA) or are under development (i.e. European Directive requiring online pharmacies to display a common logo and Member States to provide a list of authorized vendors on the Internet).
- The Center for Safe Internet Pharmacies, CSIP, aims to promote and encourage safe online pharmacies through education, enforcement, and information sharing. This multi-stakeholder approach includes representatives from the Internet ecosystem and each point in the online advertising and purchase/delivery cycle, including domain name registries, registrars, shipping companies, payment processors, and advertising service providers.
- Many national associations of pharmacists have partnered with regulatory authorities and industry to raise public awareness on the danger of buying medicines online through health promotion campaigns which also include social media and Internet.

¹¹ Operation Pangea V. <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Pharmaceutical-crime/Operations/Operation-Pangea>